



Panther Update

August 2009

Big Cat Field Stories

July: A Productive Month for Panther Moms

Three kitten dens were found in July by wildlife teams from BCNP and the FWC (see table below). The kittens of FP168 sported unusually colored pelages. Not albinos, their coats were mostly white, with very faded markings. “We’ve had lighter than normal kittens before, sort of an ashy gray, but these boys were practically all white”, commented Mark Lotz.

July 2009 Florida Panther Kittens

July	Mom	Location	Identity	Sex	Age
8	FP153	Big Cypress National Preserve	K281	M	30 Days
			K282	M	
20	FP168	Flint Pen Strand/Crew	K283	M	5-7 Days
			K284	M	
28	FP170	Picayune Strand State Forest	K285	M	~21 Days
			K286	M	
			K287	F	



FP170's Offspring at Three Weeks courtesy the FWC

Determination and Perseverance

By Deborah Jansen, Big Cypress National Preserve

Last month, the difficult search for FP153's den was noted in the Update. At that time, the possibility was emerging that we might have to give up on finding her kittens. Of the 37 dens the NPS team had found in Big Cypress, this one was by far the most challenging. The trip in involved an hour-long swamp buggy ride from the nearest road plus a 15-minute hike through a marsh to



Too Young to Open their Eyes, Kittens 283 and 284 Display their Unusual Pelages by Mark Lotz

reach the edge of the 36-acre hammock FP153 had selected to house her offspring. The team made this trip seven times in order to set up the den monitoring box, triangulate on FP153's location, and search for the kittens. Because these kittens were born in the summer, there were the added complications of water, mosquitoes, heat, and frequent lightning storms.

The first time in entering the hammock to search for kittens while FP153 was away hunting, we expected to find fairly sparse vegetation dotted with a few pockets of dense vegetation. Those denser areas are preferred by panthers for a more secure den site. Instead, there stood a solid understory of six-foot-high sword fern. *Nephrolepis exaltata* can form closely-packed, nearly impenetrable thickets. Perfect for hiding kittens. A nightmare for finding them.



Kittens 281 and 282 Found at Last! by Ralph Arwood

Ultimately, on July 8, photographer Ralph Arwood spread the right clump of fern apart and discovered the bare soil indicative of where a large animal had recently lain. Ralph then crawled in a distance before he reached the kittens tucked under a mat of fern roots. There were two males, slightly under four pounds each. John Kellam, BCNP biologist, aptly nick-named them “Determination” and “Perseverance”.

As an added note, we were surprised when FP153 settled in to den in early June. Her previous den was found only a year ago.

This timing makes it probable that her three kittens, marked last year, have perished. Juveniles usually disperse between 12 and 18 months-of-age, however, females have gone into estrus while still raising offspring.



BCNP's John Kellam versus *Nephrolepis exaltata*
by Ralph Arwood

Ask a Biologist.....

Where's Mom When Kittens are being Handled? By Mark Lotz
Although we've experienced all sorts of scenarios, the typical pattern is for the mother to remain at the den with the kittens for 5-7 days straight after giving birth. That kind of consistent location reading is what prompts us to pinpoint a mom's location and set up the box. Then we take advantage of the first time she leaves. Normally she gets hungry, leaves the den, and will stay out until she makes a kill. This usually involves several hours, giving us plenty of time to process the kittens during the time she kills something and gets her fill. Subsequently, her trips away from the den are relatively short because she will make a beeline to the kill, grab a quick bite, and return fairly rapidly. It's not until she has to make another fresh kill, which requires more time, that we have another good opportunity to get in to handle the kittens. It takes about 20 minutes on average to process a kitten (sex, weigh, deworm, insert transponder, take biopsy sample, acquire hair sample, collect fecal sample if they're kind enough to provide one). So with three kittens, as in FP170's case, it entailed about an hour. But in FP168's case, she was very close by and was coming back, or so we thought. Dave Onorato and I hurried to finish with the kittens but it turned out she just passed by and continued north.

What Humans are Doing

An article entitled "Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan", written by Mark Lotz and Layne Hamilton, was published in the Summer 2009 edition (Volume 2, Issue 2) of Wild Felid Monitor. Copies should be available soon for a small fee: see www.wildfelid.com/WFA%20Newsletter.html

What You Can Do This Month

On Thursday, July 30, about 100 people made the trip to Everglades City, reported Lisa Ostberg, FFPNWR President. They gathered to learn more about the proposed construction of two wildlife underpasses along US 41 near Turner River outside Naples, an area where four panthers have been killed by vehicles in the last five years. Thanks to everyone who traveled there to show support! Lisa suggests, **"You can still lend your voice of support for this critically needed project by completing and returning the public comment form soon to be located on our website: please help us speak up for panthers and other wildlife!"** <http://www.floridapanther.org/>

Learn about and then submit your comments regarding the "Jetport" Proposal. A Neighborhood Information Meeting was held by Miami-Dade County Park and Recreation Department on *August 3* to discuss the creation of a recreation area in the "Jetport" region of Big Cypress National Preserve. The recreation area will authorize the use of motorized vehicles on designated trails and the construction of a visitor's center. This area is within panther habitat. Please contact Thomas Greenwood for information and to express your concerns by *September 3*.

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Special Thanks To.....

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